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SUBJECT: CODEL KOLBE AND HDAC ENGAGE INDONESIAN LEGISLATORS

REF: STATE 22598

SUMMARY

¶1. CODEL Kolbe met on February 21-22 with top legislators from the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR) in the first overseas visit of the House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC). Indonesian legislators welcomed the CODEL's expertise on legislative affairs and its encouragement for the independence and empowerment of the legislative branch. DPR members repeatedly requested additional resources, while also expressing concern about the optics of an American assistance program in which Indonesia might be seen as placed on a par with East Timor. End Summary.

CODEL MEETINGS AT THE DPR

¶2. CODEL Kolbe, joined by President of The Asia Foundation Doug Bereuter, spent two days with Indonesian members of the DPR, discussing congressional processes and the importance of an independent legislature.

The CODEL consisted of Representative Jim Kolbe (R-Arizona); Representative Lois Capps (D-California); Representative Adam Schiff (D-California); Representative Allyson Schwartz (D-Pennsylvania); HDAC Staff Director John Lis; Professional Staff Member Robert Lawrence, and House International Relations Committee Professional Staff Member Dan Getz. After an introductory call on DPR Speaker Agung Laksono, who joined the CODEL in a public ceremony formalizing HDAC-DPR cooperation, CODEL Kolbe met separately with representatives of the DPR's 10 party factions, the DPR Budget Committee, the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, the Budget Committee, the Legislative Body, the House Administration Committee, and the U.S. Caucus. Additionally, CODEL members met with small groups of legislators for less formal discussions, and they held an offsite meeting with members of a newly formed team of DPR members charged with compiling an agenda for reforming the parliament's institutional mechanisms.

¶3. DPR members repeatedly asked about various aspects of the CODEL members, rights, responsibilities, and prerogatives. When discussing their own system, the Indonesian legislators recited a litany of complaints, including:

- inadequate staffing levels, and the fact that most administrative staff are in the employ of the DPR Secretariat, which is an executive branch institution;

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- the lack of expertise of DPR staff members, especially for legal drafting and research;
- myriad difficulties in information gathering, which hampers oversight of government agencies and leaves the legislature at a disadvantage vis--vis the executive branch;

- inadequate financial resources, and the public's lack of support for efforts to increase salaries for legislators; and
- difficulties communicating with constituents, and the expectations of constituents that legislators can provide handouts.

¶4. Members of the DPR's Legislative Body explained that they were in the process of drafting a law to provide the DPR with the authority to determine its own budget, so that the legislature would no longer need to rely on the good graces of the executive branch. (Emir Moeis, the Chairman of the DPR Budget Committee, noted it was particularly difficult to carry out oversight of the Ministry of Finance, when that Ministry controlled the DPR's budget.) The DPR had also formed a team of legislators with a three-month mandate to review institutional mechanisms and recommend changes. This team's mandate included the areas of:

- rules of procedure;
- bureaucratic reform;
- budgetary processes and accountability;
- infrastructure and facilities; and
- communications and public access to information.

¶5. Indonesian legislators expressed great interest in receiving concrete assistance in order to increase the effectiveness of the DPR. Legislators most often decried their inadequate resources to hire staff, noting each member of the DPR was provided with only a single staff member, who typically functioned as a secretary or clerk. Committees with dozens of members with responsibility for broad subject areas typically had only a handful of expert staff) for example, the DPR's Commission I, with responsibility for defense, foreign policy, intelligence, and communications, had only three expert staff members. DPR members also cited a need for new computers and a modern library. When the CODEL

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explained that the next step in the HDAC program would be a visit of approximately 10 DPR Members and staff to the United States to gain exposure to American legislative practices, numerous legislators expressed interest in joining that exchange program.

¶6. DPR members noted they typically saw the United States as an advanced model of democratic practices. However, they also displayed a certain sensitivity to the optics of the HDAC program. At the opening ceremony formalizing HDAC-DPR cooperation, DPR Speaker Agung Laksono, addressing members of the press in Indonesian, emphasized that the HDAC had not come to Indonesia to dictate to members of the DPR; Agung highlighted for the media the remarks of CODEL members that the exchange encompassed a two-way dialogue, and that the American legislators sought also to learn from the Indonesian side. Indonesian interlocutors repeatedly asked how Indonesia had been selected for a program that included East Timor, hinting they were uneasy with the appearance the two countries fell into the same category. CODEL members stressed that the HDAC had selected five partner countries -East Timor, Georgia, Indonesia, Kenya, and Macedonia- after considering a mix of factors, including the newness of the countries, democracies, ongoing efforts in each to implement parliamentary reforms, and the countries, size and importance.

¶7. On various occasions, when dialogue strayed from institutional matters, the CODEL's Indonesian counterparts sought to ascertain the CODEL's image of Indonesia's democracy and the degree of perceived Islamic radicalism in Indonesia. DPR members also discussed current events, urging steps to address the grievances of Palestinians and in some cases stressing Indonesian support for Iran's effort to engage in peaceful nuclear research.

MEETING WITH CT OFFICIALS

¶8. Outside of the DPR, the CODEL also met with leading figures engaged in Indonesian counterterrorism efforts. These interlocutors noted the GOI,s efforts to arrest and prosecute those engaged in terrorism, but, despite some successes, they cited difficulties stemming from existing rules of evidence, and the lack of legal grounds to charge persons training militant jihadists. One high-ranking security official said that it would be necessary to embrace the more moderate jihadists and turn them against the most radical members of the terrorist organizations.

DINNER WITH ECONOMIC OFFICIALS

¶9. The Ambassador hosted a February 21 dinner in the CODEL,s honor with select members of President Yudhoyono,s cabinet and other prominent figures, primarily from the economic field. The discussion centered on the state of Indonesia,s economy, the investment climate, and anti-corruption efforts. Specifically addressing the oversight efforts of the DPR, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said she often found legislators had a zeal for oversight but often held unrealistic notions about economic policies.

¶10. CODEL Kolbe has cleared this cable.
PASCOE